

March 24, 1959

Dr. Dean B. Cowie
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Dear Dean:

We have just been through our second meeting of the WESTEX Committee, that is the Western Group on Extra-terrestrial Biology. Urey was with us and we did have a very instructive and stimulating time. I was most interested that he brought up Mueller's Meteorite and this reminded me that we had left over for later discussion the possibility that you might try to go after analysis of similar materials in a more comprehensive way. Have you or Abelson thought about this some more? It really would be a valuable contribution. Urey raised one additional question: whether or not one could specifically identify the organic material in the meteorites, it would be amusing to know whether it was susceptible to attack by any terrestrial micro-organism. This has a considerable bearing on the extent of legitimate concern for planetary infection. Do let me know your current views.

I am certainly very much encouraged by the stand that is being taken in this country with respect to planetary contamination. Even with respect to the moon, Urey now seems to have a much more conservative attitude than he may have had some few months ago. Certainly at our last session we found absolutely nothing to argue about.

Yours as ever,

Joshua Lederberg